

It's Not Too Late to Save Kyrgyzstan

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In 2005, the world's heads of states, gathered at the United Nations headquarters in New York, agreed that they had a **responsibility to protect** their own peoples from mass atrocities -- and that the responsibility would fall to the larger community when a state proved unable or unwilling to prevent such crimes. Since that time, violence reaching the legal threshold of crimes against humanity (the other specified constituent crimes are genocide, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing) has been perpetrated in Sudan, Sri Lanka, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and arguably in Kenya, Burma, and Zimbabwe, among other places. In almost every case, the world has failed to muster an even remotely effective response. So far, it looks like we can add Kyrgyzstan to the list; but it's not too late to get things right.

In the explosion of ethnic violence that rocked the southern city of Osh starting June 10, as many as half the country's 800,000 Uzbeks were forced to flee their homes before marauding mobs of ethnic Kyrgyz, apparently abetted by government troops...But this might be the lull before another storm: Uzbeks may seek revenge, in turn provoking new attacks from Kyrgyz or from the Kyrgyz-dominated security forces. Naomi Kikoler of the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect calls the violence "**a textbook case of R2P**," as the norm has come to be abbreviated.

(...) In the first moments of the crisis, Kyrgyzstan's interim president, Roza Otunbayeva, issued a desperate call to Moscow to provide troops. Instead, Moscow referred the matter to its own regional body, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which then declined to authorize action. Russia had cited **R2P** -- with transparent cynicism -- to justify its 2008 invasion of South Ossetia and Georgia. Why not now, with a willing government and a genuine crisis?

(...)But military force is only one, and not necessarily the most effective, response to "**R2P situations**

." In 2008, swift diplomacy prevented post-electoral violence in Kenya from turning into mass slaughter; tough sanctions at the very outset might have halted the killings in Darfur. The

current lull in violence in southern Kyrgyzstan, and the eagerness for help displayed by a very weak but democratic regime, gives international actors a second chance to get things right, and without an urgent military intervention.

(...)The Security Council discussed Kyrgyzstan once last week, and neither Secretary General Ban Ki-moon nor council members have shown much urgency on the subject. But the White House has been engaged in virtually round-the-clock consultations on mechanisms to prevent another outbreak of violence, along with Russia, various allies, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose current head is Kazakhstan. Here, too, it might be necessary to ask the Security Council to authorize some kind of "stabilization mission," perhaps involving police or constabulary forces rather than peacekeepers.

(...) Russia may be cynical on **R2P**, but this U.S. administration is not. In his [National Security Strategy](#) released last month, Obama vowed to remain "proactively engaged in a strategic effort to prevent mass atrocities and genocide." Last summer, when the Sri Lankan government killed thousands of civilians in its campaign to wipe out a vicious terrorist group, the administration worked quietly, and as it turned out ineffectively, to stanch the violence. Kyrgyzstan presents an easier test -- about as easy as

R2P

situations are likely to get. This time, no points for trying hard.

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